



Review

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Carafiol sees himself “less as a lone explorer plunging into uncharted territory than as a rabble-rouser clamoring, along with others, to get a hearing for unpopular views” (8). It is always salutary to find a scholar who measures himself honestly. One part useful survey of Transcendentalist scholarship, one part brief but provocative reading of a few works by Thoreau and Emerson, his book is more than the sum of its parts. It is a well-timed and well-directed broadside aimed at those who make a career of Transcendentalist studies—or in American literary scholarship, traditionally conceived—as well as at those newly entrenched in institutional power who think they have found the *real* meaning of America. Whether or not Carafiol’s Rorty-esque neopragmatism will mark the future direction of our study is debatable, but we owe it to ourselves to consider his arguments.

Philip F. Gura, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

***Classics of Civil War Fiction.* Ed. David Madden and Peggy Bach. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi. 1991. viii, 223 pp. Cloth, \$37.50; paper, \$15.95.**

The senior writers in this collection of essays on Civil War fiction are so patriarchal (even the women contributors), so argumentative, weighing and measuring (How good was *Raintree County*? Is MacKinlay Kantor’s earlier *Long Remember* better than his later *Andersonville*?), that attentive junior readers will find it difficult not to get into it with them, all this contentious comparison and judgment.

Is *Long Remember* actually better than *Andersonville*? What, after all, is a classic Civil War fiction? You could argue that almost all the Civil War fiction studied here is distinctly minor, one genre piece after another, far from classic. You could argue the study omits these several certifiably classic texts: Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman*/D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With The Wind*/David O. Selznick’s *Gone With The Wind*. You could argue that William Faulkner’s Civil War novel, for better or worse, is *The Unvanquished*, not *Absalom, Absalom!*

I expected Ishmael Reed, writing on Ambrose Bierce, to be bristly, a jolt. He’s perfunctory, desultory. Stephen Becker, unsuccessfully laboring to make John William DeForest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* interesting, gets off this great sentence: “He returned to Europe, this time on a more conventional grand tour—England, France, Florence, for a season; Trieste, Vienna and Venice briefly; then Graefenberg for the waters, which were rebarbative if not roborative.” You could say of this collection, in its own terms, too valedictory, too hortatory.

A curious note. All the writers, primary and secondary, in this book were born in states that fought the Civil War. Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, have no Civil War memories, no Civil War dreams, no Civil War writing. Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Mississippi, these states are still in the field, so to speak, each still dreaming its Civil War. They are, really, the states of mind in this collection, Virginia reading

Ellen Glasgow, Kentucky reading Andrew Lytle. This is, I think, the best reading one can give *Classics of Civil War Fiction*. Iowa speaks here, remembering its Civil War, as do Michigan and West Virginia.

Neil Schmitz, State University of New York at Buffalo

***Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*. By Mary Loeffelholz. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press. 1991. viii, 179 pp. Cloth, \$32.50; paper, \$13.95.**

Dickinson, the “half-cracked Poetess” writing in her white dress within the confines of her father’s house, and Dickinson, the oeuvre of nearly 1800 brilliantly radical and elusive lyrics, have long been recognized as an unavoidable quandary for American feminist criticism. In particular, the extremity of her life and art has invited a large array of psychoanalytic and deconstructive readings, and has made it seem difficult but imperative to understand her place in a female literary tradition. In *Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*, Mary Loeffelholz reverses this pattern of reading, asking instead what Dickinson’s poems can tell us about feminist reinterpretations of psychoanalytic and literary theory. Loeffelholz’s book thus embraces an ambitiously double agenda, offering both an account of how Dickinson’s poetry locates itself within literary tradition and a critique of the attitudes towards self and language presumed by feminist discussions of this tradition.

For Loeffelholz, as for so many Dickinson critics, literary tradition proves to be a family romance. With precise and elegant readings Loeffelholz shows how Dickinson writes through the Law of the Father, criticizing and subverting the attitudes towards nature, poetic inspiration, and divine power that underlie the poetics of Emerson and Wordsworth. This classically oedipal battle, she argues, resonates more fully in Dickinson’s poetry than do the mother-centered pre-oedipal theories of a revisionary feminist psychoanalysis. The mothers of this story are Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily and Charlotte Brontë—and Loeffelholz’s strength lies in demonstrating that Dickinson’s relations with them remain as complex and conflicted, though differently so, as her ties to her male precursors. Loeffelholz charts the divisions and discontinuities Dickinson associates with the maternal. Her readings reveal how female sexuality and domesticity come intimately enmeshed with violence and destruction, and how that violence is constitutive not only of external patriarchal threats but also, and even more threateningly, of internal female identity. These readings thus offer a serious critique of those feminist psychoanalytic theories that would posit a pre-oedipal moment in which the mother-child dyad might stand happy, harmonious, and replete; and they offer a destabilizing re-evaluation of those feminist literary theories that would presume a nurturing and continuous female literary tradition.

In the place of such claims for a unitary female psyche and literary tradition, Loeffelholz posits a female identity based upon fragmentation: “a relational, not an absolute, identity.” Loeffelholz’s own relation to the traditions of feminist criti-